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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002593

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SUBJECT: A GRIM VIEW FROM TIKRIT

Classified by Political Minister Counselor Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: An Iraqi-American community leader based in Tikrit, Salaheddin province, recently warned that public alienation from the local government was approaching dangerous levels. Hatem Mukhlis (strictly protect) described the provincial government as dominated by members of the Jabouri tribe, whom he characterized as corrupt and ready to use brutal means to stay in power. If credible provincial elections were not staged in the near future, public support for the insurgency will grow, he predicted. While Mukhlis' stark assessment may be partly colored by inter-tribal rivalry, his warning about the dangers of indefinitely postponing provincial elections tracks with other reporting from PRT Salaheddin. End summary.

¶2. (C) Hatem Mukhlis (strictly protect throughout), an Iraqi-American community leader in Tikrit, warned poloff during an August 10 meeting in Baghdad that the public in Salaheddin governorate were getting fed up with an ineffectual and corrupt provincial government, dominated by members of the Jabouri tribe. The Jabouris were running the province on the Saddam Hussein model, he contended. He was certain the Jabouri incumbents were bent on thwarting fair and open provincial elections, knowing that if they were fair, they would lose their seats. Potential political rivals were being denounced to the MNF or Iraqi security establishment as terrorists, or otherwise removed from the scene, he charged.

¶3. (C) Worse, Mukhlis charged, the Jabouris were using local Iraqi police as muscle to impose their will on the public. Mukhlis showed poloff a video (on his cell phone) that depicted the corpse of a young man (bet. 20 and 30) who appeared to have been systematically tortured to death - the body was riddled with fresh scars and/or burns, and several fingernails and toenails were missing. Mukhlis said that the man had been taken by Iraqi police in Salaheddin in May, 2008, who subsequently returned the body to his family.

¶4. (C) Iraqi Police raided Mukhlis' home, damaging his personal property, on several occasions, he charged. The IP had also seized all of the medical equipment in a community health clinic he set up, and then offered to sell the equipment back to him, he claimed. He eventually recovered the equipment by appealing for high level intervention, he said.

¶5. (C) If the provincial elections do not take place in a timely manner, and are not perceived as fair and open, the loyalty of the local population will inevitably gravitate back to Al-Qaida and other insurgency elements, Mukhlis warned. Insurgents were already capitalizing on the public's alienation from the local leadership. If the Iraqi police take the lead in security arrangements for the local elections, all will be lost, he stated. He opined that the Iraqi army, supported by MNF, should be in the lead, with the

IP relegated to a subordinate role.

¶6. (C) Mukhlis was gloomy about the Sons of Iraq and the Sahwa in Salaheddin. He opined that these groups were attracting "rif raf" and opportunists and were led by people with dubious societal credentials - often those described as "tribal leaders" were selected for their loyalty to a given organizer rather than for the legitimacy as leaders within their own tribes. While the Sahwa groups represented a short-term fix to the security problem, Mukhlis opined, they could easily revert back to insurgency.

¶7. (C) Mukhlis believed service delivery was the key to winning public support for their elected local and national government. As long as leaders seem more interested in lining their pockets and suppressing potential rivals than they are in providing a reliable electricity supply, clean water, good schools, etc, it will be impossible to realize sustained security gains in Salaheddin, he underlined.

¶8. (C) Bio note: Hatem Mukhlis' family has deep roots in Salaheddin province, and were prominent supporters of the Hashemite Monarchy installed by the British. After emigrating to the U.S., Mukhlis practiced medicine for decades but became involved with anti-Saddam expatriate efforts after his father was executed in 1990 by Saddam's regime. He is a co-founder of the Iraqi National Movement, which paralleled (and rivaled) Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress. Mukhlis returned to Iraq in 2003 and tried to generate a political following but garnered almost no support. He received a few votes in the January 2005 elections, despite the boycott of most major Sunni Arab

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political figures, and has remained on the margins of the Salaheddin political theater since then. End bio note.

¶9. (C) Comment: Mukhlis' dim view of the Jabouris who dominate the provincial government is likely colored by inter-tribal rivalry. However, his warning that the failure of the local government to improve service delivery has sharply eroded public confidence in the GOI is a very common theme nationwide. His warning that an indefinite postponement of provincial elections will deeply anger the local populace tracks closely with other reporting from PRT Salaheddin. End comment.

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